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AUTHOR	Smith, Anne B.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This study explored the nature of staff roles and relationships in four New Zealand kindergartens during the process of change that ocurred when a new staff member was taking up a position. The study attempted to identify features of early childhood settings in which relationships among staff were working well and settings in which they were not. The major themes emerging from a series of interviews of teachers (N=12) were goal consensus and power sharing in decision making. Successful kindergartens, in which harmonious staff relationships developed, involved all staff in developing philosophical agreement and clarifying roles. Unsuccessful kindergartens, in which staff problems culminated in resignations, evidenced conflict between experienced and inexperienced teachers about teacher roles. Successful kindergartens worked through consensus and negotiation, while unsuccessful kindergartens worked through the authority of the head teacher or the majority view. A list of 13 reference items is included. (BC)

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Early childhood teachers: roles and relationships*

Anne B. Smith, Bruce W. McMillan,

University of Otago

Shelley Kennedy and Brenda Ratcliffe

Research and Statistics Division, Ministry of Education

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Abstract

Staff roles and relationships were studied through interviewing 12 teachers in 4 New Zealand kindergartens over a period of 8 months before, during and after a new teacher joined the staff. In 2 of the 4 kindergartens serious problems with staff relationships emerged culminating in staff members resigning, while in the other 2 kindergartens harmonious relationships developed. The major themes emerging from the interviews were the importance of goal consensus and power sharing. Successful kindergartens involved all staff for a considerable time in developing philosophical agreement and clarifying roles but there were serious differences of viewpoint between staff in the unsuccessful kindergartens, often involving conflict about teacher roles and activities between experienced and inexperienced teachers. The successful kindergartens worked through consensus and negotiation while the unsuccessful kindergartens worked through the authority of the head teacher or by the majority view. It was concluded that more attention needs to be given to helping early childhood staff work together effectively and that staff roles and relationships are an important component of quality early childhood education.

Staff roles and relationships are a critical yet relatively unexplored component of good quality early childhood education and care. One early childhood teacher in this study described their central importance for her.

> For me the major problem of kindergarten teaching is trying to develop a workable relationship with another person you don't choose to work with - an effective relationship with others when your ideas and approaches may be quite different.

The nature of colleagial relationships between staff has been given very little attention in the research literature. It is accepted, however, that family situations of conflict or disharmony (Hetherington & Camara, 1989) are not supportive of children's optimal development, so it would be expected that children could be adversely affected by being in early childhood centres where relationships between staff are strained. Staff disharmony is also likely to lead to lower job satisfaction and a higher turnover of staff, preventing children from developing long-term stable relationships with staff.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasises that development is closely related to the ecological environment. A microsystem is the most immediate setting to influence the developing person, in which he or she is directly involved with others in terms of roles, activities and relationships. It is therefore worth examining the development of teachers' roles and relationships within the microsystem since they influence children both directly and indirectly. Bronfenbrenner also believes that studying natural ecological transitions is a valuable way of collecting data.

Feiman-Nemser & Floden (1986) in their review of studies about the "cultures of teaching" argue that there is a gap in knowledge about "the meaning of teaching" to teachers and the origins of those meanings" (p505). They argue that more research is needed on how teachers see their role from an insider's point of view. The present study has used a situation of staffing change in kindergartens to examine staff

perceptions about their relationships with each other and their roles, before, during and after the change. Kindergartens are the main state-supported, part-time early childhood programme for 3 and 4 year-olds in New Zealand.

One cause of dissatisfaction between staff members in early childhood centres has been hierarchical, authoritarian centre management. Tizard et al (1980) found that lack of staff autonomy in institutions for children was associated with a lower quality of care, fewer conversations between staff and children and little freedom to make decisions about schedules. Flexibility, autonomy and shared decision-making have been argued by practitioners (eg Hubbard and Keay, 1979) to be an important component of good quality early childhood programmes. Dresden and Myers (1989) reject hierarchical models of power and authority as inappropriate for early childhood professionals and advocate consensus and shared power and responsibility along a web model as opposed to a top-down pyramid model. Kontos and Stremmel (1988) studied burn-out in childcare and found that a factor related to burnout was the dissatisfaction of staff with administrators' styles of communication.

Katz (1980) has differentiated teaching and mothering roles in early childhood. Mothering, according to Katz, is wider in scope than teaching, and involves more spontaneity, partiality and intense attachment to the child. Teachers have a narrower role which is more intentional, rational, detached and group rather than individual orientated. Katz emphasises that teachers plan, analyse and bring knowledge to bear on their work with children. In this role as decision-makers and rational planners, teachers need to work together with other teachers as part of a professional team. Their ability to plan, operate and monitor early childhood programmes jointly is likely to be a major factor in their professional effectiveness.

Jorde-Bloom (1986) identifies "organizational structure" (formal and informal decision-making), teachers' roles and responsibilities, and the social system (social relationships) as key components in her analysis of job satisfaction in childcare. Maslach & Pines (1977) found that in childcare centres where staff had the opportunity

to participate in staff meetings, staff had a much more positive attitude to children and were happier in their jobs. Better work relationships were associated with more teamwork, and they resulted in a greater liking for the job, a greater sense of success, and a report of more 'good days' and fewer 'bad days'.

Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986) in their review of research on the "culture of teaching" argue that there is a prevalent "hands-off" norm amongst teachers, in which teachers are expected to work in isolation. Teachers are often on friendly, supportive terms but avoid substantive talk about their work or shared problem-solving.

Little (1982) studied norms of collegiality in an ethnographic study of elementary and secondary schools. Successful schools differed from less successful schools in the extent to which teachers engaged in frequent, continuous and specific talk about teaching practice; were observed and provided with critical feedback; and planned, designed, researched and evaluated teaching materials together. Teachers in successful schools placed a higher value on interdependent (rather than independent) work, experimented with new practices, and took each others' interests and obligations into account.

The present study explored the nature of staff roles and relationships in four kindergartens during a process of change - when a new staff member was taking up a position and becoming adjusted to it. The study was a part of a larger study looking at the impact of a new staff member on staff/child interactions and staff perceptions of their work situation generally (Smith et al, 1988a; Smith et al, 1988). The aim of this part of the study was to identify features of early childhood settings where relationships were working well and of the settings where things were not going well, in order to seek ways to resolve or avoid such problems.

Method

Sample.

New Zealand kindergartens are free half-day early childhood programmes (5

mornings for 4 year-olds and 3 afternoons for 3 year-olds) run by trained teachers. Teachers work with a maximum group size of up to 40 children but the average attendance during this study was about 28 children. There is usually a head teacher who takes a leadership role, and 1 or 2 other teachers staffing a kindergarten. (For more details of the early childhood system in New Zealand see Smith, 1987). In 1987 a new staffing scheme was implemented, involving the phased in introduction of a third teacher to selected kindergartens. As part of an evaluation of the introduction of a third teacher into formerly 2 teacher kindergartens, 8 kindergartens, (4 in Auckland and 4 in Wellington - 2 of New Zealand's major cities) were selected for detailed study. The present study uses interview material from 12 teachers in 4 of these kindergartens - the ones acquiring a third teacher.

All of the teachers were female and were an average age of 32 years. They had been teaching for an average of 7 1/2 years and had typically been 1 1/2 years in their present kindergarten. Ten of the twelve teachers (83%) were married but only 40% had children.

Data Collection.

Interviews began in November 1986, at the end of the academic year before the new teacher joined the staff in four of the kindergartens. A second series of interviews was carried out in March/April, 1987 about 2 months after the introduction of a new teacher, and a third series was carried out in July, 1987 about 6 months after the introduction of a new teacher.

A team of four researchers worked on the project. Two of them (Shelley Kennedy and Brenda Ratcliff) were mainly responsible for the observations and interviews but the researchers worked together on developing procedures.

Each interview took about an hour (including material not used here). Relieving teachers were arranged so that teachers could be interviewed during working hours. Because the interviewers spent approximately 3 weeks in the kindergarten at each one

of the visits to collect observational data, the researchers and teachers became very familiar with each other. Researchers were part of the every day context of the kindergarten for around 9 weeks in total.

The interview schedule consisted of a combination of open-ended questions and Likert-type rating scales. The present paper focusses on one section of the interview schedule entitled Staff Relationships, particularly the open-ended questions. Data analysis consists of a descriptive analysis of the interview material. (Details of the interview questions can be obtained by writing to the senior author).

Results and Discussion

On the basis of serious problems emerging in some kindergartens (leading to at least 1 staff member resigning) some kindergartens were labelled "unsuccessful" while others were labelled "successful" (no staff members left and staff said they got on well). This section begins with a brief description of the situation in 2 kindergartens, 1 successful and 1 unsuccessful. Data from all 4 kindergartens is discussed in relation to themes which emerged from the interviews.

Kindergarten A.

The head teacher, Jane, is an older woman in her early fifties who has been a kindergarten teacher for 18 years but only one year in this kindergarten. The second teacher, Mary, is in her twenties and has been teaching for 3 years but has only just started at this kindergarten. The third teacher, Nicola, is also in her twenties and had been teaching for 6 years but is the new teacher in this kindergarten. Neither of the two younger teachers have children of their own and Jane's children are grown-up. Both Jane and Mary were enthusiastic about getting a third teacher in order to provide more one-to-one contact with children, better supervision, more extension for children who were nearly 5, and more special attention to quiet children. Both expressed relative satisfaction with their job situations (both gave a rating of 2 on a 1 to 5 scale with 1 being "very satisfied" and 5 being "not at all satisfied") at

the first interview. Jane did not feel that the third teacher would make any difference to staff relationships, responsibility for decisions or staff communication. She felt that planning and evaluation would be very much affected and that work roles and responsibilities would be somewhat affected.

At the second interview, a month after the third teacher, Nicola, had started, everything seemed to be going very well. Jane and Mary rated their job satisfaction as a 2 and their satisfaction with the success of having a third teacher as high (both rated it 1). Jane thought that they were achieving a lot more and sharing responsibility well. Jane felt that she could delegate more and didn't have to see herself so much as "head teacher". Jane's views about the effect of the third teacher had changed. While she had not expected staff relationships to change at the first interview, she now said that they had changed a considerable amount. She also found that staff communication and work roles and responsibilities had changed very much.

Mary felt that the new teacher had stimulated them into thinking of lots of new ways to do things and she had several positive comments about the input of the third teacher. She had only expected a modest effect of the third teacher on staff relationships, decision-making, roles, and communication, but at the second interview she indicated that these were more affected than she had expected.

Nicola, the new teacher, was very satisfied (rating of 1) with her job and with the success of having 3 teachers in the kindergarten at her first interview (concurrent with the second interview for the other 2 teachers). She had felt welcomed by the other staff and felt that they planned their work and discussed it. She thought that the kindergarten was a difficult one with a lot of challenge for her in working with the parents and children ("Politeness is not encouraged at home" and "The children are defiant").

Views had changed at the time of the third interview in July. Jane's job satisfaction rating had dropped from 2 to 3 and she rated herself as "Not at all

satisfied" (5) with the success of the introduction of a third teacher. She felt that communication had broken down leading to a lot of strain and heartbreak. It appeared that the first and second teacher had become very friendly for a while, but when the interview was carried out, Nicola (according to Jane and Mary) was not communicating with either of the other 2 teachers.

Mary also felt that there was a communication breakdown and a "personality clash" with the third teacher. Her personal satisfaction with her job and with the third teacher scheme had declined to a 3 but this was not such a marked drop as for Jane and Nicola.

Nicola confirmed that things were not going well. Her job satisfaction rating had dropped from a 1 ("Very satisfied") to a 5 ("Not at all satisfied"). She described the situation as "horrible" and said that "people are not what they seem." She was very unhappy indeed and felt that her ideas were crushed by the other two teachers - "If something is planned two are against it". The other two were not willing for her to try out new ideas. She was critical of the kindergarten programme, commenting that the children could be being stimulated a lot more, and that there is not much contact with parents in the kindergarten.

From the above description, it is apparent that staff relationships had completely broken down at Kindergarten A at the final interview. Jane took most of the decisions herself and there was no communication between Nicola and Jane or Mary. Jane and Mary were united against Nicola. Nicola was so unhappy at the kindergarten that she left half way through the year while the third interviews were still going on.

Kindergarten B.

The head teacher, Kate, 36, has been a kindergarten teacher for 4 years, all of that time at her present kindergarten. Alice, the other teacher, is 21. She has been teaching for only a year and also has only been at the one kindergarten. The third teacher, Lyn, is 29. She has had 8 years of kindergarten teaching but has just come

to this kindergarten. Neither Alice nor Lyn have children but Kate has 2. Kate and Alice have been working together for a year. Kate liked her job but gave it a rating of 3 because it was so frustrating and pressured with only 2 teachers. Alice rated her job satisfaction a bit higher (2) than Kate. The two teachers felt strongly that they needed a third teacher and had ideas for how they would use the extra person - an issue they have obviously discussed, because they said similar things in their interview. They planned to have one teacher (in turns) assigned the role of "intensive teacher" where there would be special activities planned and children with whom they will work, while the other 2 would supervise inside and outside areas. Kate expected there to be marked changes in relationships, decision-making, roles, communication and planning. Alice expected relationships and communication to change a good deal and decision-making, planning and work roles to change somewhat.

At the second interview both Kate and Alice were very satisfied with their job, with both now rating job satisfaction as 1. Kate rated the introduction of a third teacher as highly successful and Alice also rated it as successful. Kate found that relationships had not changed as much as she had expected, nor had decision-making or staff communication, but time spent planning and evaluating and work roles and responsibilities had changed a great deal. Alice also found that relationships and roles haven't changed as much as she had expected. Kate felt that "a lot more productive work" was being done with children and that she could spend more time with parents. Their scheme of having an intensive teacher was working well. Children were settling better and the staff did observations of children during sessions. Alice felt that they could do more real teaching instead of just supervising. She was enjoying the extra person to talk to and the new ideas.

Lyn, the new teacher, was also very happy with work (1) and with the third teacher situation and felt that the kindergarten was a very positive place for the children to come to, as their individual needs are attended to. She said that there have been no problems at all with being the third teacher, and that she had felt

welcome.

Things were almost as positive at the third interview. Kate and Lyn's job satisfaction was relatively high (2) while Alice's was even higher. (The drop from 1 to 2 is likely to be due to the time the rating was taken - in the middle of the busy winter term). All teachers rated the introduction of the third teacher as very successful and they felt that they were providing more opportunities and experiences for the children. They felt that they worked very comfortably as a team, that the workload was less, and that they were providing a better programme.

Things have worked out extremely well in this kindergarten. As, Kate, the head teacher said: "It all just fell into place."

Emerging Themes.

Two of the 4 kindergartens had developed good staff relationships and 2 did not. One teacher told us that you could not plan for a harmonious staff situation. While we agree that there is an element of luck in having a compatible group of people who get on well together working in the same team, there are some very clear differences between the mode of functioning of successful and unsuccessful kindergartens. We judged that two main elements associated with harmonious functioning were goal consensus and shared power.

Goal Consensus.

Attitudes, philosophy, and beliefs about what a kindergarten should be aiming for, and frequent opportunity to discuss and iron out differences between views was a major factor which emerged from the teacher interviews. In the

two unsuccessful kindergartens there were very definite differences in viewpoints with each "camp" holding different opinions. In unsuccessful kindergartens teachers who had very firmly held expectations about what should be accomplished, were disappointed at their inability to achieve what they expected.

In one unsuccessful kindergarten a new teacher was enthusiastic about trying out some new ideas but met resistance from the other two teachers. Jane and Mary believed that Nicola was keeping the children to herself and leaving few individuals for them to teach, while Nicola believed that the others were lazy and did not put effort into encouraging children to work with them. Initially they had been willing to go along with the new ideas but then closed ranks against the new teacher. The new teacher had high hopes for the power of the kindergarten to change children. She believed, "Children are an open book and you write on it". She thought that the kindergarten experience "can help children cope with life better later on and give them confidence to cope with traumas." Although she found some children defiant and aggressive and others quiet and withdrawn, she believed in her power to change things. She was highly motivated and enjoyed working with children in small groups. Nicola thought that the head teacher retreated into administrative work, from the more important work with children.

The head teacher, Jane, with her long experience in kindergartens was reluctant to go along with changes recommended by this younger and more inexperienced teacher. She had found a mode of operating which suited her and she

did not wish to change it. In this kindergarten teachers had different philosophies about how to run the kindergarten.

At the final interview Nicola, who afterwards left the kindergarten, said:

> My philosophy is different to the others. I see a big need for parent contact and it is not offered here. More could be done with the programme. I am not able to do it comfortably because of opposition from the other two....

In another unsuccessful kindergarten there was also a difference of opinion over philosophy and programmes. Two new staff members were both new graduates, but one was mature and very assertive. Although inexperienced, both teachers were articulate and committed to their own values and goals. While the head teacher complained at their lack of practical skills and idealistic approach based on what she perceived as theoretical views, they complained that not enough plannning and deliberate teaching was done. Julie, the head teacher, wanted to work much more in large groups with teacher-led activities (to help prepare children for school), to have more equipment put away (and brought out at different times) and more firm discipline. Sally and Phillipa preferred to work with individuals and with small groups, do more observation of children and develop individually-designed programmes. Sally thought that children feeling good about themselves and having a good time were important in kindergarten, but that there were other things (like knowing colours, shapes, writing own name, completing tasks etc) which were considerably more important. Julie felt that it was more important that children felt good about

themselves rather than knowing about colours, shapes etc, which she felt would be learned at school. Julie said that she taught "by experience and instinct" and felt that she couldn't express things verbally as well as the other staff.

The difficulties appear to be very much one of a clash of values between an older and more traditional style of kindergarten teaching and a more dynamic, interventionist approach: One of the teachers said:

> I think it is definitely very difficult when two teachers have very different ideas. It is quite frustrating and it creates a lot of tension when you are trying to work as a team and there are differences in philosophy.

In contrast, in the successful kindergartens, the teachers did agree about goals and had spent considerable time clarifying these with each other. The head teacher in one kindergarten, Kate, says:

> Initially you have to meet together and discuss philosophy. For example, I, as head teacher made it clear what I would accept as discipline. Philosophy must be spelt out from the word 'go'. You must know what the other person's views is and be supportive to each other. If there is a problem, everybody must understand that it must be aired in the office at a later date.

The head teacher in the other successful kindergarten said:

> You need to spend a lot of time talking about how you personally feel about a number of issues - when you are setting limits, how we approach parents, how

> we work with other professionals, how we would like to work with the children, whose responsibility it is to do various jobs. .... It is extremely important from the children's point of view that there is consistency - for that compromise has to be worked out well in advance to be of any benefit to the children.....

Another teacher in the same kindergarten said:

> I suppose that it is just a fortunate situation that we all have essentially the same rules or standards or whatever.

The staff in the successful kindergartens, however, have worked quite systematically on developing a shared sense of goals. Time had been spent on working these ideas out. As one teacher said:

> You have to set aside time to sit down and work out how to run the kindergarten, discuss philosophies. And be open to change and new ideas. You have to make an effort to work as a team and to change things to suit the three of you and not just do things the way they were done before - ensure the new person doesn't just have to fit in with you.

In the unsuccessful kindergartens, staff did try to communicate, but they were too far apart to be able to compromise. This resulted in abandonment of any attempts to communicate.

Power and Decision-Making.

Struggle over power and who should make decisions were part of the difficulties experienced in the kindergartens with problems. Julie, the Head Teacher in an unsuccessful kindergarten, thought even before the third teacher started, that a head teacher:

> might have to assume a more dominant role.... just decide its easier to make the decision yourself, and then just pass on what you've decided to the others.. Especially if you think you can avoid discussion or disagreement about something, you might just think, 'I've decided to do it my way'.

She maintained the view that the head teacher should run the kindergarten and felt undermined by the senior head teacher (a more senior person who works with several kindergartens in an advisory and supervisory position) telling her that she should compromise with the two other teachers. Because the other two teachers were united in their view she felt that she was outnumbered. Phillipa believed that they had to compromise but recognised that she and Sally had the upper hand because "the majority rules". Sally thought that:

> the input of a third teacher should mean the responsibility for decisions is less the head teacher versus the other teacher and more of a group-based decision. This doesn't always happen here. I think that it should all be consensus-based.

There was no real resolution of the power struggle at the final interview in the unsuccessful kindergarten because both more inexperienced teachers had decided to leave. Julie (the head teacher) still wanted to do things her way. She had been forced

to compromise and carry out some things which she really didn't agree with. She had not changed her views, but hoped to get some support from the other new teachers. She expected a shift in power in the direction of her views, with the arrival of other teachers.

In the other unsuccessful kindergarten the majority view also ruled - this time the head teacher and second teachers' views won out over those of the third teacher.

In the harmonious kindergartens, on the other hand, decisions have been arrived at by consensus rather than through power of numbers. The head teacher in both cases wanted to share decisions with other staff. Although the third teacher still had the final responsibility for decisions, shared decisions "put a little less on everyone's shoulders". One head teacher said:

> I've never had a situation where we haven't been able to reach an equal sort of consensus and compromise (but I do feel that ultimately the responsibility for the decision is left with the head teacher)

There are very clear and unambiguous role definitions in the successful kindergartens. Agnes says:

> We all have our areas of responsibility, for instance one of us does the attendance registers, one does the donations and so on. There are a number of jobs that are specific jobs, that are regular jobs that we share so in that sense I think we have lightened our administrative load.

Possible Ways to Reduce Problems.

The suggestions made by teachers about ways to avoid problems included setting aside plenty of time for discussion with new staff; group contracts; visits before accepting the job to assess compatibility; involvement of the head teacher in choice of new staff; probationary periods for the third teacher to ensure compatibility. The head teacher in one successful kindergarten believed that:

> the most important thing is to make the third person part of the existing structure, to make her feel valued and an integral part of the team. We find the best way to do that is to talk about everything and listen a lot.

The expertise of the head teacher, especially in matters of personal relationships, is critical. Head teachers do not always have the necessary skills as facilitators and leaders. Their experience in the kindergarten gives them expertise in planning programmes for children but little preparation for managing and working with other adults.

The isolation of staff in kindergartens means that contact with outside people is necessary. Senior staff able to step in and help, who have both the time and the skill to help teachers deal with conflict and work out relationships, are important. (Senior teachers were involved in trying to assist in both unsuccessful kindergartens in this study). Senior teachers need to have skills in management, communication, assertiveness, and coping with conflict.

Greater emphasis on handling interpersonal relationships through role-playing and

similar techniques in both pre and in-service courses is necessary. Senior staff, especially those trained some time ago, need refresher courses to give them access to new ideas about early childhood education, including modern management styles. Value clashes will be less likely if experienced teachers are up-to-date in their field. A trial period for teachers to work together and see whether they can find common ground or disband at the end of a set period would be useful.

Conclusions

The head teachers in the successful kindergartens saw themselves as taking a major role as facilitating group decisions, rather than as unilateral decision-makers. In neither of the successful kindergartens did they carry on as they had before when a new teacher arrived. The process of change was jointly planned and executed.

Defining staff roles and working out relationships can be problematical as is illustrated by the finding that in two of the four kindergartens which acquired a third teacher serious problems arose with interpersonal relationships, resulting in staff members leaving in both kindergartens. Such problems are not an inevitable result of acquiring a new staff member, nor are they only associated with a group of 3 people. The situation of adding another member of staff to a team enabled the investigation of the sort of situations which do arise when new staff relationships must be formed. Such situations are not at all uncommon. Several teachers (including some in successful kindergartens) reported on having heard about such problems in other kindergartens.

In the successful kindergartens there appeared to be genuine enjoyment of the work situation, attempts to incorporate everyone's goals, excitement about the trying out of new ideas, and some genuine feeling that goals were being shared and being at least in part accomplished. In these kindergartens there was no indication that any of the staff were likely to leave.

In the unsuccessful kindergartens, on the other hand, there was conflict about goals, philosophy, and responsibilities. Commonly there was resistance to change or innovation on the part of a more experienced teacher, difficulties with communication and struggles over power.

According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological orientation, roles are an important part of the microsystem of early childhood centres. Roles are activities and relationships expected of a person occupying a particular position. They are characterised by varying degrees of degree of warmth, reciprocity and balance of power. Changes in role are associated with marked alterations in behaviour. Many of the problems we observed appeared to be associated with differing understanding of the role of head teacher held by different teachers, exacerbated by having to change and re-define roles. Clear conceptions of roles and a great deal of warmth, reciprocity and balance of power in relationships characterised well-functioning kindergartens. Good relationships were nurtured carefully. The introduction of a new teacher probably sparked problems in some kindergartens because it did involve role transition and this necessitated a change in the usual pattern of behaviour of all

participants.

Jorde-Bloom (1986) suggests that leadership style and interpersonal relations are a key component of job satisfaction and her view receives support from the present study. We found, as did Maslach & Pines (1977) that a collaborative model was an effective one. Dresden and Myer's (1989) view that a consensus web model as opposed to an inverted triangle hierarchical model is an effective one in early childhood centres is also given support. Little (1982) found that elementary schools where teachers talk a lot about teaching practice and try out new ideas together were successful. Such colleagial interdependence and experimentation was also a characteristic of the successful kindergartens in the present study.

This study suggests that developing positive interpersonal relationships is a critical area where many early childhood centres need help. The close and continuing contact between teachers requires considerable shared understanding and purpose. If relationships are unhappy this is likely to lead to many negative effects on staff, children, parents and reduce the quality of the early childhood education provided.

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